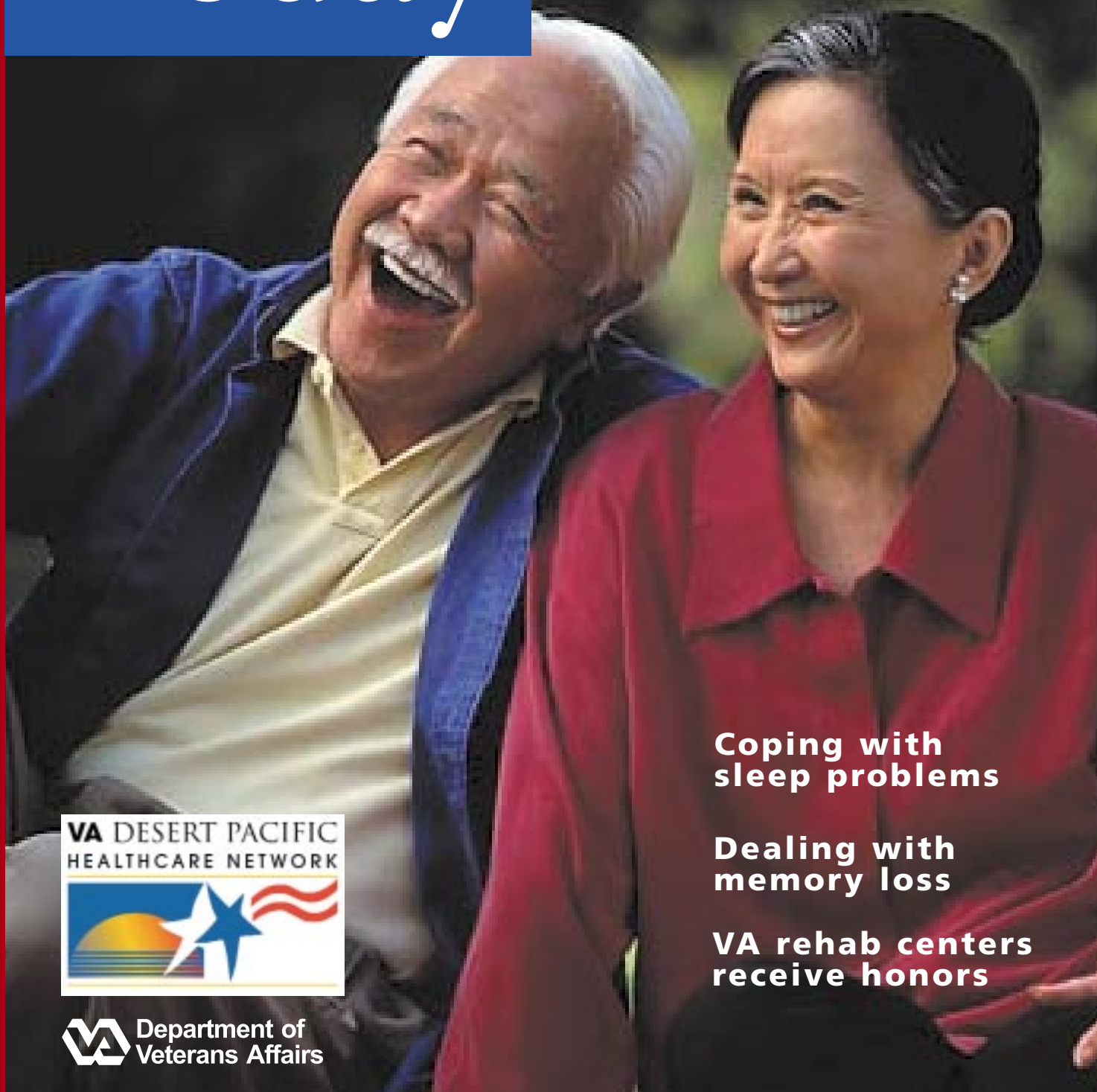


Veterans' Health Today

W I N T E R 2 0 0 3



 Department of
Veterans Affairs

**Coping with
sleep problems**

**Dealing with
memory loss**

**VA rehab centers
receive honors**

Does losing your keys have you worried?

by Josea Kramer

Older veterans may sometimes worry about becoming more forgetful. Many people experience memory lapses. Have you ever forgotten where you put your keys, parked your car or set your eyeglasses? These are usually not serious problems. As we get older, our brains, like the rest of our bodies, can slow down a bit. This normal slowing is called age-appropriate memory impairment. But a persistent memory problem that affects your daily functioning, such as getting lost while driving or leaving the stove on unattended, may indicate that something else is going on.

The symptoms of dementia

Some memory problems are serious and caused by changes in brain function. These symptoms are called “dementia” and involve gradual memory loss, problems in reasoning, disorientation and difficulty in learning new things. People may keep repeating the same question; become lost in familiar places; be unable to follow directions; get confused about people, places or time; and neglect their own safety, hygiene and nutrition. People with dementia may also experience changes in their personalities and behaviors. They can have delusions (belief in a reality that doesn’t exist) or hallucinations (seeing things or people that don’t exist).

Several diseases cause dementia by destroying brain cells.



As we get older, our brains like the rest of our bodies, can slow down a bit.

Perhaps the best-known cause of dementia is Alzheimer’s disease. Other diseases that cause dementia include Parkinson’s disease, Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease and Huntington’s disease. Another type of dementia is vascular dementia, a disorder caused by changes in the brain’s blood supply as a result of a massive stroke or several small strokes.

These symptoms can also be caused by reversible conditions

such as a high fever, dehydration, a bad reaction to medicine and depression. If you are worried about memory problems, it’s important to see your physician. Your doctor may recommend a complete physical, neurological and psychiatric evaluation. Your physician will also want to know more about your medical history, prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, diet and general health. Because a correct diagnosis depends

VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network Vet Centers

Anaheim Vet Center

859 South Harbor Boulevard
Anaheim, CA 92805-5157
714-776-0161

Corona Vet Center

800 Magnolia Ave.
Suite 110
Corona, CA 92879
909-734-0525

East Los Angeles Vet Center

5400 E. Olympic Boulevard
Suite 140
Commerce, CA 90022-5147
323-728-9966

Las Vegas Vet Center

1040 E. Sahara Avenue
Suite 102
Las Vegas, NV 89503
702-388-6368

Los Angeles Vet Center

1045 W. Redondo Beach Boulevard
Suite 150
Gardena, CA 90247-4129
310-767-1221

San Bernardino Vet Center

155 W. Hospitality Lane, Suite 140
San Bernardino, CA 92408
909-890-0797

San Diego Vet Center

2900 Sixth Avenue
San Diego, CA 92103-1003
619-294-2040

Santa Barbara Vet Center

1300 Santa Barbara Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101-2017
805-564-2345

Sepulveda Vet Center

9737 Haskell Avenue
Sepulveda, CA 91343-1618
818-892-9227

Vista Vet Center

1830 West Drive, Suites 103/104
Vista, CA 92083-6125
760-643-2070

West Los Angeles Vet Center

5730 Uplander Way, Suite 100
Culver City, CA 90230-6615
310-641-0326

on recalling details accurately, your doctor may also ask a family member for information.

Treatment options

If your physician diagnoses a form of dementia that can't be reversed, such as Alzheimer's, the VA has many treatment options. Medicines can help delay severe symptoms and reduce anxiety, agitation and sleep problems. Family members can turn to support groups for help in coping and in assisting their loved ones with everyday routines, physical activity and social contact.

VA has been at the forefront of developing drugs to treat dementia, so veterans are usually among the first Americans to benefit from new treatments. Currently, a Geriatric Research Education Clinical Center (GRECC) laboratory is working on an Alzheimer's prevention strategy.

Until we can reverse or prevent illnesses like Alzheimer's disease or multi-stroke dementia, scientists have recommended ways to keep your memory sharp. Get involved in hobbies, stay active physically and mentally and remember to eat a balanced healthy diet. Limit your use of alcoholic beverages, because heavy drinking over time causes permanent brain damage. Memory aids like notes and calendars are helpful. Additionally, you can enhance your memory by mentally connecting information with a familiar song, image or poem.

Need medical advice?

VA TeleCare Staff is here to help! Call toll-free 1-877-252-4866. Available 24 hours a day, every day, VA nurses can give you medical advice, help make an appointment for you to see a primary care provider and even tell you what you and your family can do at home to help take care of your health problem.

Publication schedule change

With this edition, *Veterans' Health Today* will change from a quarterly publication schedule to a semiannual schedule featuring winter and summer editions.

CORRECTION: Many of our devoted readers called our attention to an error in the article "Taking Charge of Diabetes" in the fall edition. Treatment of low blood sugar was incorrectly stated as "low blood pressure."



Sleep problems:

What you need to know

Are you nodding off at inappropriate times? Do you always feel tired? Are you a loud and frequent snorer? If so, you may be one of the millions of Americans who suffer from a sleep disorder. And besides affecting the quality of your sleep, some of these disorders may affect your heart health.

Sleep experts estimate that about 15 percent of all Americans suffer sufficiently to warrant medical attention. Yet only a small percentage are aware of the nature of their condition and that treatment is available.

What is a sleep disorder?

A sleep disorder interferes with your normal pattern of sleep and may cause fatigue, anxiety, depression, inability to concentrate and memory loss. Common disorders are:

- **Obstructive sleep apnea.**

Loud snoring, gasping for breath or choking during sleep characterizes this disorder, which is caused by an obstructed airway. If untreated, this sleep disruption may result in extreme fatigue and daytime sleepiness. Obstructive sleep apnea may also contribute to high blood pressure and the risk of heart attack and stroke.

- **Insomnia.** Insomnia is characterized by the persistent inability

to fall asleep or stay asleep. Over time, the lack of sound sleep may lead to excessive daytime sleepiness and fatigue. Loss of memory, reduced ability to concentrate and more frequent illness may follow.

- **Narcolepsy.** A sufferer of narcolepsy will frequently experience an irresistible urge to sleep. Other symptoms include temporary weakness when excited or surprised, inability to move or talk upon falling asleep or experiencing vivid dreamlike scenes when waking up or falling asleep.

- **Restless legs syndrome (RLS).** RLS is characterized by crawling or tingling sensations in the legs while awake and an irresistible urge to move the legs during rest. Leg movement may cause frequent awakenings and result in excessive daytime sleepiness, an inability to carry out normal duties and feelings of anxiety and depression.

- **Periodic limb movement disorder.** Periodic involuntary contractions of leg muscles during sleep cause jerking movements and frequent partial awakenings. The resulting disrupted sleep causes daytime fatigue despite an apparent full night's rest. People with this disorder may report aching legs before bedtime or when getting up.

If you suspect that you have any of these sleep disorders, you should consult your physician immediately. All of them are serious, and some may be life threatening.

10 tips for getting a good night's sleep

The importance to your health of getting enough sleep can't be overstated. Lack of sleep affects not only your energy level but also your mental and social functioning.

If you're having difficulty falling asleep or if you're waking during the night, try these tips:

- **Quash worries.** If you're concerned about something, make a list of the steps you'll take to solve the problem.
- **Avoid cigarettes.** Nicotine can cause sleeplessness and shallow sleeping.
- **Avoid caffeine** after your evening meal.
- **Avoid alcohol.** A drink may help you fall asleep, but sleep is disrupted as the amount of alcohol in your blood decreases during the night.
- **Go to bed at the same time** each night, and wake up at the same time each morning.
- **Don't read or do work in bed.** You want to associate getting into bed with going to sleep.
- **Avoid strenuous exercise** or emotional upset close to bedtime.
- **Exercise during the day** to help make your body feel relaxed and fatigued come nighttime.
- **Take a warm bath** or drink a cup of warm milk to help you relax.
- **Don't nap during the day.**

Honored to serve heroes

VA gives former POW a new lease on life

Two compelling events helped shape James Jess Hannon's life forever: He had the misfortune of being captured and held prisoner during World War II in Europe and he faced down the Japanese in the Pacific. Through the VA staff's cooperation and dedication at Loma Linda and the VA Regional Office in Los Angeles, VA made another difference in this veteran's life.

Mr. Hannon served in the United States Army from 1942 to 1945. In serving his country in Europe, he was held as a German POW in Poland where he managed to escape and walk more than 1,000 miles through Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania to join other American soldiers. He then served as a member of an intelligence service group in China where he performed many secret missions, helping rescue prisoners from the Japanese. When he returned home in 1945, James J. Hannon was a twice-wounded former prisoner of war and recipient of the Purple Heart with Clusters and the Presidential Citation with Cluster.

Over the years, the many wounds suffered by Mr. Hannon began to adversely affect his health. In the mid-1980s, he went to the VA to make a claim for a service-connected disability. He was

disappointed at the reception he received and left, vowing to never return to a VA facility again.

For the next 15 years, Mr. Hannon's injuries became worse. To make life more difficult, Hannon's finances reached a critical low. Around January 1999, Mr. Hannon had a chance to talk to the staff at the VA Regional Office in Los Angeles. Immediately grasping

"VA has changed my life. I can't imagine being treated any better. I still can't believe how courteous, considerate VA employees are. I am eternally grateful. If I were a rich man," he said, "I couldn't receive better care." —James J. Hannon

the severity of Mr. Hannon's problem they contacted VA Loma Linda Healthcare System. With the help of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, this formidable team went to work identifying the staff needed to help Mr. Hannon. Within a short time, VA physicians saw Mr. Hannon. He was rated 100 percent disabled and was awarded "a livable income."

In the truest sense of the word, James Jess Hannon is a hero. He represents a myriad of patients treated in VA hospitals throughout the Network and around the country. Because of the actions of many dedicated VA employees, James Jess Hannon will live his life with dignity and compassion.

Disabled veterans get priority health care

Effective October 1, 2002, VA established priority access to health care for severely disabled veterans. The new regulation is being implemented in two phases.

Under the first phase, VA will provide priority access to health care for veterans with service-connected disabilities rated 50 percent or greater. This includes hospitalization and outpatient care for both service-connected and non-service-connected treatment. All veterans with medical emergencies will continue to be the first patients treated in any VA medical facility.

During the second phase, to be implemented next year, VA will provide priority access to other service-connected veterans for their service-connected conditions. If you are 50 percent service-connected, on a waiting list or have an appointment that exceeds your doctors recommended time frame, you will be contacted, and your appointment changed. If you have any questions, please contact your local VA facility or read additional information on eligibility and enrollment on VA's website at www.va.gov/elig.

VA rehabilitation programs nationally recognized

by Robin T. Guttler



The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has a proud history of providing some of America's most modern, sophisticated and comprehensive rehabilitation programs. One of the VA's cornerstones is Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PM&R), also referred to as physiatry.

This specialty practice treats patients with limited function caused by disease, injury or disability. Physiatrists help restore the veteran's physical, psychological and emotional well-being, allowing him or her to return to productive living. Doctors also prescribe ways to maintain the veteran's health, cope with new challenges, find relief from pain and avoid complications.

Reasons for referral

Patients are referred to PM&R when their pain or disability has caused (or could cause) a reduction in their ability to perform daily activities. VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network

facilities provide a full range of state-of-the-art rehabilitation services to inpatients and outpatients with acute and/or chronic conditions.

Services include consultation, evaluation, treatment and education in the following areas:

- **loss of functional abilities**, such as self-care, walking, cognition and perception or community skills
- **neuro-musculoskeletal dysfunction**
- **electrodiagnostic procedures**
- **cardiac rehabilitation**
- **chronic pain**
- **wellness program** of exercise testing and prescription
- **drivers' evaluation** and training
- **evaluation and fitting** of prosthetic, orthotic and adaptive equipment
- **fall prevention**

Teaming up

Successfully treating the patient is a team effort. The most crucial

members of the team are the patient and his or her relatives, friends and loved ones. Team members from the VA include physiatrists, rehabilitation nurses and exercise physiologists; kinesiologists, occupational, physical, recreational and vocational therapists; biomechanists, orthotists and prosthetists; and

support staff.

The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities has accredited all Comprehensive Inpatient Rehabilitation programs in VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network. Successful accreditation is a national VA mandate for all inpatient comprehensive rehabilitation programs.

In 2001, the Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System Comprehensive Medical Rehabilitation Program was designated as a Center of Excellence by the Department of Veterans Affairs, one of five rehabilitation programs in the nation to achieve such status. This prestigious award is based on meeting stringent criteria showing improved clinical outcomes and patient care processes.

VA provides comprehensive rehabilitation services ranging from ambulatory and acute to long-term care and continually conducts patient satisfaction surveys and extensive research to continually improve the care to veterans.

Earthquake safety rules

by Linda L. Swan



An earthquake strikes your area and for a minute or two, the “solid” earth moves like a ship’s deck. What you do during and immediately after the tremor may make life-and-death differences for you, your family and your neighbors. These rules will help you survive.

During the shaking

- Don’t panic. The motion is frightening, but unless it shakes something down on top of you, it is harmless. Keep calm and ride it out.
- Stay indoors. Take cover under a desk, a table or a bench; in doorways or in halls; or against inside walls. Stay away from glass.
- Don’t use candles, matches or other open

flames, during or after the tremor. Douse all fires.

- If you are outside, move away from buildings and utility wires. Stay there until the shaking stops.
- Don’t run through or near buildings. The greatest danger from falling debris is just outside doorways and close to outer walls.
- If you are in a moving car, stop as quickly as safety permits, but stay in the vehicle. A car will joggle fearsomely on its springs during the earthquake, but it’s a good place to stay until the shaking stops.

After the shaking

- Check your utilities, but don’t turn them on. The movement may have cracked water, gas and electrical conduits.
- If you smell gas, open windows and shut off the main valve. Then leave the building and report the gas leakage to authorities. Don’t reenter the house until a utility official says it is safe.
- If water pipes are damaged, shut off the supply at the main valve.
- If electrical wiring is shorting out, shut off the current at the main meter box.
- Turn on your radio or television (if conditions permit) to get the latest emergency bulletins.
- Stay off the telephone except to report an emergency.
- Don’t go sightseeing.
- Stay out of severely damaged buildings. Aftershocks can shake them down.

Volunteers needed:

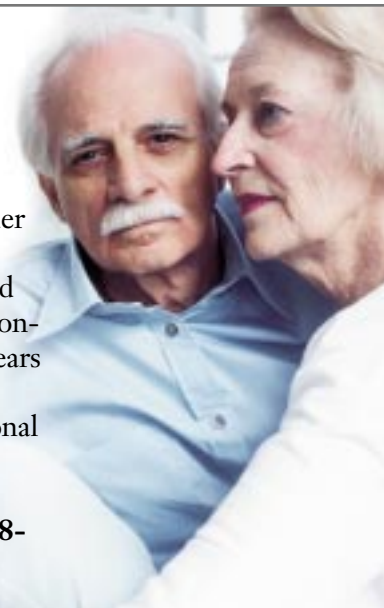
Largest-ever prostate cancer prevention trial

The VA Desert Pacific Healthcare Network facilities and other locations around the nation are looking for men ages 55 and older for the largest-ever prostate cancer prevention study. The Selenium and Vitamin E Cancer Prevention Trial, or SELECT, will help determine if these two dietary supplements can protect against prostate cancer.

Participants in SELECT will not need to change their diet in any way. Men may join SELECT if they:

- are 55 years and older (50 and older for African-Americans)
- have never had prostate cancer and have not had any other cancer, except non-melanoma skin cancer in the past five years
- are generally in good health

For more information call the National Cancer Institute’s Cancer Information Service at **1-800-4-CANCER** or VA Loma Linda, **909-558-3114** or **909-558-3107**; VA Long Beach, **562-494-5755**; VA Los Angeles, **310-268-3670**.



REACHING US IS EASY

★ VA Medical Centers

VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System

Addelir D. Guy III
Ambulatory Care Center
1700 Vegas Drive
Las Vegas, NV 89106
702-636-3000

Mike O'Callaghan Federal Hospital

4700 Las Vegas Boulevard North
Las Vegas, NV 89191
702-653-2215

VA Loma Linda Healthcare System

11201 Benton Street
Loma Linda, CA 92357
909-825-7084

VA Long Beach Healthcare System

5901 East Seventh Street
Long Beach, CA 90822
562-826-8000

VA San Diego Healthcare System

3350 La Jolla Village Drive
San Diego, CA 92161
858-552-8585

VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System

11301 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90073
310-478-3711

▲ Community Clinics

Anaheim

1801 W. Romneya Drive
3rd Floor, Suite 303
Anaheim, CA 92801
714-780-5400

Antelope Valley

547 W. Lancaster Blvd.
Lancaster, CA 93534
661-729-8655

Bakersfield

1801 Westwind Drive
Bakersfield, CA 93301
661-632-1800

Cabrillo

2001 River Avenue
Long Beach, CA 90810
562-388-8000



Symbol Key

- ★ VA Medical Centers
- ▲ Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Chula Vista (South Bay)

835 3rd Avenue
Chula Vista, CA 91910
619-409-1600

Corona

800 Magnolia Avenue #101
Corona, CA 92879-3123
909-817-8820

East Los Angeles

5400 E. Olympic Boulevard #150
City of Commerce, CA 90040
323-725-7557

Escondido

815 East Pennsylvania Avenue
Escondido, CA 92025
760-745-2000

Gardena

1251 Redondo Beach Boulevard
3rd Floor
Gardena, CA 90247
310-851-4705

Henderson

Green Valley Parkway, Suite 215
Henderson, NV 89014
702-456-3825

Imperial Valley

528 G Street
Brawley, CA 92227
760-344-1881

Las Vegas

MASH Village
1581 N. Main Street
Las Vegas, NV 89101
702-386-3140

Lompoc

1111 E. Ocean Avenue, Suite 8
Lompoc, CA 93436
805-736-7767

Los Angeles

351 E. Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012
213-253-5000

Mission Valley

8810 Rio San Diego Drive
San Diego, CA 92108
619-400-5000

Oxnard

250 W. Citrus Grove Avenue
Suite 150
Oxnard, CA 93030
805-983-6384

Palm Desert

41-865 Boardwalk, Suite 103
Palm Desert, CA 92211
760-341-5570

Pahrump Medical Center

1430 E. Calvada Blvd., Suite 100
Pahrump, NV 89048
775-751-2053

VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System

Pasadena VACC

1350 N. Altadena Drive
Pasadena, CA 91007
626-296-9500

San Luis Obispo

1288 Moro St., #200
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401
805-543-1233

Santa Ana

Bristol Medical Center
2740 S. Bristol Street
1st Floor, Suite 101
Santa Ana, CA 92704
714-825-3500

Santa Barbara

4440 Calle Real
Santa Barbara, CA 93110
805-683-1491

Sepulveda

16111 Plummer Street
Sepulveda, CA 91343
818-891-7711

Sun City

28125 Bradley Road, Suite 130
Sun City, CA 92586
909-672-1931

Upland

1238 E. Arrow Highway, No. 100
Upland, CA 91786
909-946-5348

Victorville

12138 Industrial Boulevard
Suite 120
Victorville, CA 92392
760-951-2599

Vista

1840 West Drive
Vista, CA 92083
760-643-2000

Whittier/Santa Fe Springs

10210 Orr and Day Road
Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670
562-864-5565

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Long Beach, CA 90822

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